

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

Claims 1-10 (canceled)

Claim 11 (currently amended): A method of producing a protein of interest, comprising:  
culturing a Gram positive bacterial strain that expresses the said protein, wherein the bacterial strain is a gram positive strain the size of the genome of the bacterial strain is equal to or less than 3.2 Mb, and wherein the bacterial strain does not express a functional HtrA protease; and,

recovering said protein exported by said strain in the culture medium.

Claim 12 (canceled)

Claim 13 (previously presented): A method according to claim 11, wherein the bacterial strain is selected from a group consisting of *Streptococcaceae*, *Lactobacillaceae*, *Bacillaceae* of the *Staphylococcus* genus, *Bacillaceae* of the *Listeria* genus, and *Enterococcaceae* of the *Enterococcus* genus.

Claim 14 (previously presented): A method according to claim 11, wherein the bacterial strain is selected from a group consisting of *Lactococcus* spp., *Lactobacillus* spp., and *Streptococcus thermophilus*.

Claim 15 (previous presented): A method according to claim 11, wherein the bacterial strain does not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 16 (currently amended): A method according to claim 11, further comprising: introducing into the bacterial strain a nucleic acid having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably linked to a promoter, wherein the nucleic acid is not integrated into a gene encoding the HtrA protease; and

culturing the bacterial strain under conditions causing expression of the protein from the nucleic acid.

Claim 17 (currently amended): A Gram positive bacterial strain ~~according to claim 23 wherein the strain has having~~ a genome that is equal to or less than 3.2 Mb in size, ~~with the proviso that the bacterial strain is not a *Lactobacillus helveticus* strain having a gusA reporter gene inserted into a gene encoding the HrtA protease, and wherein the bacterial said strain: does not express any functional HtrA protease: and~~ comprises an expression cassette having a sequence encoding a protein of interest operably linked to a promoter; with the proviso that ~~the~~ said bacterial strain is not a *Lactobacillus helveticus* strain having a *gusA* reporter gene inserted into a gene encoding the HrtA protease.

Claim 18 (previously presented): A bacterial strain according to claim 17, wherein the strain does not express a functional PrtP protease.

Claim 19 (withdrawn): A method of producing a fermented product, comprising: culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 23 with a fermentation substrate under conditions suitable to produce a fermented product.

Claim 20 (withdrawn): A method of producing a dietetic food, comprising: culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 23 with a substrate under conditions suitable to produce a dietetic food.

Claim 21 (withdrawn): A method of producing a medicinal product, comprising: culturing a bacterial strain according to claim 23 HtrA with a suitable substrate under conditions effective to produce a medicinal product.

Claim 22 (withdrawn): A method according to claim 21, wherein the medicinal product is a vaccine.

Claim 23 (canceled)